



State of Wisconsin  
Department of Health Services

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Jim Doyle, Governor  
Karen E. Timberlake, Secretary

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## New Report Highlights Wisconsin's Obesity Problem

*Communities Are Encouraged to Help Reverse the Trend*

At least half the adults in every county in Wisconsin are either overweight or obese, according to a new state report. The new Department of Health Services report, *Obesity, Nutrition, and Physical Activity in Wisconsin*, indicates that the obesity rate for adults in the state has more than doubled since 1990, reflecting a nationwide trend.

"Obesity is an epidemic not only in Wisconsin, but across the whole country," said Secretary Karen Timberlake. "Reversing this harmful trend in Wisconsin would likely save more than a billion dollars annually in medical costs, but it will require the involvement of organizations and communities across the state. All of us – teachers, parents, businesses, and government employees – have a stake in turning these trends around."

Many of the behaviors that help prevent obesity and maintain healthy body weight are already well known. Eating more fruits and vegetables, being more physically active, breastfeeding infants, limiting television viewing time, and curbing consumption of calorie-rich foods and sugar-sweetened drinks can all help reduce weight.

However, fewer people realize that communities and organizations also need to make changes that will help people be more active and choose healthier foods. Examples of community efforts to foster healthy behaviors include:

- **Implementing a wellness program at your worksite.** Employers may be eligible for the Governor's Worksite Award, which recognizes organizations that promote a work environment that encourages and enables their employees to improve their health and well-being. To get started, use the Worksite Wellness Resource Kit available on the Department's website.
- **Creating opportunities for people to easily walk and bike.** Open a school or shopping center for walking. You can complete a walkability or bikability assessment in your neighborhood from the Department's Active Community Environments Resource Kit.
- **Improving the nutrition environment in your community.** Start a community garden or farmers' market; explore opportunities to promote farm-to-institution (schools, worksites, hospitals) initiatives to improve access to fruits and vegetables; implement nutrition standards for public vending machines to offer healthy choices; provide nutrition information (calories, fat, sodium) for consumers at the point of purchase in vending machines, cafeterias, restaurants, grocery stores and convenience stores.
- **Promoting and supporting breastfeeding in your community.** Pass a local ordinance that supports a woman's right to breastfeed and provide areas for breastfeeding women to care for their children at local fairs and events and other public spaces; implement a worksite lactation program to support women returning to work.

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- **Promoting wellness at your school.** Apply for the Governor's School Health Award, which promotes healthy eating, physical activity, alcohol and drug-free lifestyles, and parental and community involvement; get involved with your school's wellness committee to work on improving healthy food availability on the school campus (school stores, fundraising, vending, a la carte) and opportunities for physical activity; start a school garden; start a Safe Routes to School Program to encourage children to walk to school.

The Department has its *Wisconsin Nutrition and Physical Activity State Plan*, along with a variety of toolkits and other resources for Wisconsin communities, schools, worksites, child care centers, healthcare organizations, and other groups to use on its website at <http://dhs.wisconsin.gov/health/physicalactivity/index.htm>

A copy of the *Obesity, Nutrition, and Physical Activity in Wisconsin* full report and executive summary are also available on that site.

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